DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 978 PS 024 779

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TITLE Meeting Family and Community Needs: The Three C's of Early Childhood Education.
PUB DATE 1995-12-00
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Conference on the First Years of School (6th, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, January 1996).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Community; Community Influence; Community Services; Context Effect; Cooperation; *Early Childhood Education; Family Needs; Family (Sociological Unit); *Social Change
IDENTIFIERS Continuity; Socioeconomic Diversity

ABSTRACT

The efforts of those interested in the advancement of early childhood education have been focused mainly on pedagogical issues. Today, given the increasing complexities of life, it is an intellectual and functional imperative to take a contextual/developmental approach to early childhood education. This approach addresses two parameters of children's lives: their families and the communities. Part of this approach is to identify the following critical issues: (1) acknowledging the critical social trends that affect children and their families; (2) meeting the needs of diverse populations and communities; (3) discerning what families want and what communities provide; (4) establishing priorities between services to children and services to families; (5) understanding and addressing the lack of continuity and coherence; (6) deciding to focus on direct services or on the infrastructure; and (7) redressing the limited understanding of and constituency of early childhood education. The other part of the contextual approach is to address change, continuity, and collaboration. Through analytic investigation, educators need to examine not only demographic changes, but also technological, data, and political changes that influence children, their families, and communities. Strategic planning for change will produce the contextual changes that are needed for the support of children and their families. In order to have more durable and systematic changes, the creation of opportunities for continuity among communities--based on the knowledge acquired in the fields in the past--is necessary. Finally, it is important to have collaboration not only within the field but also outside the field. Such an outside collaboration may involve families, communities, and social, economic, and political leaders. (Contains 41 references.) (AS)

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MEETING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NEEDS: THE THREE C'S OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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December, 1995

ABSTRACT

In order to address even the most fundamental developmental and pedagogical needs of young children, this paper suggests that we must also concentrate on two of the most significant contextual parameters that encase children's lives--their families and communities. Incorporating commitments to families and communities--or thinking and acting contextually--means that early educators must: (1) acknowledge the critical social trends that affect children and families; (2) meet the needs of diverse populations and communities; (3) discern what families want and what communities can and do provide; (4) establish priorities between services to children and services to families; (5) address the lack of programmatic continuity and coherence; (6) decide to focus on direct services or on the infrastructure; and (7) redress the limited understanding of, and constituency, for early childhood education.

While outsiders often ascribe the goals of primary education as focusing on the pedagogical domains of reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic, this approach is too narrow because it does not does not adequately address the contextual domains of families and communities. To do so, we must adopt an alternative framework that shifts the focus from the three "r's" to a focus on the three "c's" that have historically hallmarked our field--notably change, continuity, and collaboration. This paper suggests concrete ways for doing so. To achieve the first of the three "c's"--change--analysis must be used to advance practice; we need to examine changes in technology, data, and politics as they affect children and families. The second "c"--continuity--suggests that we acknowledge the field's link with the past and construct solutions with the goal of cementing a more cohesive, more equitable field for the future. Finally, collaboration demands that we recognize that the future of early childhood education rests as much with those outside our field--families, communities, and the economic, social, and political leadership of our nations--as it does with those within the field. We must, therefore, mobilize new constituencies committed to the care and education of young children.

In conclusion, the author calls on the early childhood field to build upon the truly fundamental principles of the profession--change, continuity, and collaboration--in an effort to meet the needs of families and communities.

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Prepared for:
The Sixth Australia and New Zealand
Conference on the First Years of School
Hobart, Tasmania
January, 1996

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, those interested in advancing the care and education of young children have often focused their efforts on pedagogical issues: what is nature of childhood learning? how can teachers advance children's development most effectively? do various curricular interventions make a difference and, if so, for which children under which conditions?

While seminal to the lives of young children and to the field of early childhood education, these questions reveal only a portion of the issues to which those concerned about young children must attend. This paper suggests that in order to address even the most fundamental developmental and pedagogical needs of 21st century young children, we must also address the two most significant contextual parameters that encase their lives--their families and communities.

Historically, taking this contextual/developmental approach has been deemed advantageous (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), but today--given the increasing complexities of contemporary life--it is both an intellectual and functional imperative. Intellectually, *thinking* contextually is not difficult for those in early childhood education, but functioning or acting contextually is. Acting contextually demands, as the first section of this paper details, that critical issues be clearly *identified*; and, as discussed in the second section of the paper, that they be systematically *addressed*. Identifying and addressing such contextual issues will create new challenges for all early educators, yet by building on our profession's unique strengths--notably a durable commitment to the three c's: change, continuity, and collaboration--we are actually quite well-prepared for these responsibilities.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

While many issues contour the delivery of services to young children and their

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families, the following seven are particularly related to thinking and acting contextually.

Issue 1: Acknowledging the Critical Social Trends That Affect Children and Families

It has been suggested that the nature of social change takes place incrementally, but that its pace occurs with cumulative velocity. Little could be more true of the last decades of the twentieth century. Whether living in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Rim, or the newly democratized nations of Eastern Europe, the pace of change--hastened by advancing capitalism and increased technology--has wrought social trends of vast proportions...trends that have not always been good for children and families.

Drawing on demographic data throughout the industrialized world, we see that:

* child poverty rates are growing; for example, while the percentage of children living in poverty in Western Europe ranges between 3 and 8 percent, in the U.S. almost 20 percent of young children live in poverty;
* more children are living in single-parent or blended families. In Australia, over a half a million children live with a single parent while many others are cared for by persons other than their natural parents (Schools Council, 1992);
* children are having children; the teen birth rate (per 1,000 teens) is 9.5 in France, 10.3 in Germany, 31.8 in the U.K., and 54.8 in the U.S.;
* over 25 percent of all households in the developed world are now headed by women;
* the proportion of women in the labor force has increased over the past three decades to approximately 40 percent in industrialized countries, with more than 50 percent of single mothers in Canada, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S., and more than 80 percent of single mothers in Denmark, France, and Sweden participating in the labor force (Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1993; Himes, Landers, & Leslie, 1992).

Merely the tip of the iceberg, together these demographic trends--emergent throughout the industrialized world--have important operational consequences for children and services for them. Unlike eras past, larger percentages of children spend the better part of days in out of home care. In the U.S., 88 percent of all youngsters attend early care and education programs, or have received some sort of non-parental care at one point in their lives (Willer et al., 1991). In Australia, by age five, approximately 70 percent of children are attending school and 26 percent are attending preschool (de Lemos, 1990), and, in New Zealand, an estimated 43 percent of children under the age of five are enrolled in some form of early childhood education (Nicholl, 1992).

However dramatically social conditions affect all children, they impact poor children even more. Poor American children are more likely to live in households headed by a single parent and in areas of concentrated violence (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1990); they are less likely to see pediatricians, receive dental care and immunizations, and live in homes where their development is nurtured to its fullest (Garbarino, 1992; Gelles, 1992;

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Rosenbaum, 1992). Indeed, only 49 percent of *poor* four year olds, compared with 57 percent of *non-poor* four year olds participate in preschools (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1993), and even with considerable expansion, Head Start serves only 30 percent of all eligible children (Hofferth, 1993). Lack of access to services means that poor children often enter school bringing with them social, emotional, physical, and cognitive burdens that impede their development and educational progress. School drop-out, delinquency, and teen pregnancy are some of the disturbing results of early school failure (Schorr, 1988).

Lack of access to services not only characterizes early childhood education, but other services for children including foster care, child welfare, and health services. In short, changing demographic trends have increased the need for services without commensurately altering communities' capacity to provide such services.

Issue 2: Meeting the Needs of Diverse Populations and Communities

The increasing diversity of our countries' populations and communities presents special challenges for those concerned about the care and education of young children. However complex, the pedagogical challenges associated with meeting children's diverse needs are perhaps the most easy to address. After all, quality early childhood classrooms are designed to be exciting and enriching environments where learning opportunities are highly individualized. Such environments would appear to be natural, if not optimal, settings for work with diverse populations. Yet, preschool teachers are not routinely trained for the demands that diversity requires. Without specialized training emphasizing the importance of the home language (Wong-Fillmore, 1991), the processes and tempo for second language acquisition (Hakuta, 1986), and the role of culture in social adaptation (Garcia, 1983) teachers may be left bereft of the skills and knowledge they need to effectively work with culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Moreover, such diversity demands that assumptions of generalizability across populations regarding who teaches, what is taught, and how children are assessed need to be varied (Laosa, 1991). For example, access to differing educational opportunities has been determined by assessments that ignore cultural competence or that use majority-culture norms. As a result, cognitively normal but physically disabled or non-English dominant children may be confined to special classes. By equating intellectual competence with genetic or developmental variation to the exclusion of cultural or contextual variations (National Educational Goals Panel, 1993), we have misunderstood and simplified constructs of diversity.

Transcending the pedagogical life of children, increasing cultural diversity has implications for the ways in which communities construct their understandings of need and the ways in which policy is constructed. Community variation--within and across cultures--has become widespread. Homogenized, prescriptive policies that at one time would have been appropriate are no longer acceptable. Today's social realities demand that communities take control of their own destinies and that the diverse individuals who live in communities--

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not the professionals who parachute themselves in and out on a daily basis--be at the center of change. A commitment to fostering diversity and grass-roots community engagement demands the devolution of authority and responsibility to increasingly small units of government that are closer to diverse constituencies. Honoring diversity means creating new patterns of governance, accountability, financing. In short, meeting the needs of diverse families and communities demands nothing less than a paradigm shift in our conventional understandings and distribution of power.

Issue 3: Discerning What Families Want and What Communities Provide

Beyond acknowledging changing demographics and the new community realities that will necessitate a major paradigm shift in governance, discerning discrepancies--sometimes quite tacit and sometime quite overt--between what families really want and what communities feel they can and should provide is essential. Our own field is a good example of this issue. On the surface, it appears that most families want and feel quite satisfied with the care their young children are receiving, yet--when probed--families have indicated that they had few opportunities for real choice (Galinsky, 1992). Indeed, 53 percent of parents, if given the opportunity, would alter their child care choices (Galinsky, 1992). In reality, then, families select what they deem the "best" care from what is available to them, often, perhaps, to assuage their own guilt.

This overt dissonance in access is important in and of itself, but it is also important because it reflects tacit, more subtle differences that exist among families and the community institutions that serve them. Stipek, Rosenblatt, & DiRicco (1994) have noted that while the consumer/service provider schism is large in many fields, in early childhood differences between parental and teacher attitudes and expectations are not only widespread, but have profound effects. For example, an analysis by the National Center for Education Statistics (1993) compared parents' and teachers' beliefs regarding children's readiness for kindergarten. The study revealed that parents were more likely than teachers to rate behavioral and school-related tasks like knowing the alphabet, being able to count to 20 or more, and using pencils and paints as very important or essential for school readiness. Holding such beliefs, parents "prepare" their children for kindergartens that many teachers do not create, further advancing a family/community schism. While it may be unrealistic to expect complete value congruence between parents and caregivers or teachers, such differences in attitudes and values need to explored if there is to be continuity between family and community. In other words, beyond the need to create new structures and policies, we need to get beneath the surface and honestly examine the dissonance in values and assumptions upon which such structures and policies are based. Our conventional assumptions regarding attitudinal congruence between parents and teachers, and families and communities warrants reconsideration.

Issue 4: Establishing Priorities Between Services to Children and Services to Families

Once value dissonance is recognized, it can be addressed; in so doing, however, other

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more concrete family/community tensions often arise. One of these tensions common to many communities centers around the issue of which services should be given priority--services for children or services for families.

Again, early childhood has some light to shed on this issue in that historically we have recognized the importance of families in relation to children's developmental and education. Although efforts to engage families vary in their scope, intensity, and efficacy (Bowman, 1994; Powell 1989; Kagan 1987; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler 1987), this orientation is deemed valuable and is being manifest throughout general education (Epstein 1987; Fruchter, Galletta, & White, 1992). Yet, given the worsening state of families and children, communities debate whom to serve first. In some cases, new types of programs--two generation efforts--are emerging. These efforts provide parents with parenting education and support, but also offer high school diplomas and pre-employment training as a means to self-sufficiency (Smith, Blank, & Collins 1992). Some two-generation efforts are free-standing and some are attached to early care and education settings.

As important as these efforts are, they raise clear tensions for community programs and the staff who work in them. With limited resources, staff familiar with working with children question their appropriate roles, along with their capacity, to deliver high quality programs to adults. Staff feel especially unprepared for the challenges involved in working closely with substance-abusing parents or low-achieving adults. In programs where demands are especially heavy and resources tight, the press to serve parents in new, more intense ways is a burden that providers feel may weigh them down and may derail them from their primary job of tending to children's needs. Practitioners end up feeling like they are robbing Peter (the children) to serve Paul (the parents). In short, while the well-intentioned layering of services to families seems appropriate for a field long dedicated to parents and children alike, unless accompanied by specialized training and increased resources, this trend may represent the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Issue 5: Understanding and Addressing the Lack of Continuity and Coherence

Those involved in early care and education recognize its functional imperfections. Emanating from a history that accorded hegemony to the home and privacy and primacy to the family, early care and education services have been sidebar issues, surfacing in the U.S., for example, only at times of social crises--during the Great Depression, World War II, and the war on poverty (Cahan, 1989). Such episodic support, coupled with a legislative structure that encourages the development of categorical programs, has led to an early childhood non-system so scattered that the country cannot even agree on the number of federal programs that exist.

Illustrating this situation, the National Research Council (1990) notes that Stephan and Schillmoeller (1987) identify 22 child care programs while the U.S. Department of Labor (1988) chronicles 31 programs in 11 federal agencies. More recent figures contradict this, noting that the federal government alone funds over 90 early care and education programs in

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11 federal agencies and 20 offices (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1995). Each of these programs comes with its unique federal regulations, funding sources, and funding patterns, with few incentives to collaborate (Kagan, 1991b; Sugarman, 1991).

While heuristically interesting, such categorical approaches create havoc in the field, causing community providers to compete for children, staff, and space (Goodman & Brady, 1988). Parents, never sure of their options or of real differences in programs, are often forced to piece together services so their children will receive full care. The result is that children are juggled from program to program, rarely experiencing programmatic or philosophic continuity. This patchwork, make-shift system is detrimental to families, children, and providers alike. Historically problematic, such systemic inconsistencies and the competition they engender are multiplied as the field expands, bereft of any comprehensive plan or strategy. If communities are to come together to function synergistically, then mechanisms for collaboration must be created to stave the programmatic schisms.

Issue 6: Deciding to Focus on Direct Services or on the Infrastructure

Not surprisingly, early childhood education has been preoccupied with sustaining its basic program services and has not focused on the development of a community infrastructure to support those services. Recently, however, recognition is mounting that direct services to children will always be jeopardized if supports do not exist to shore up the system--if there are no training mechanisms to assure the quality of those coming into the field; if there is no advocacy capacity to give the field a voice alongside others advocating for their causes; if there is no data collection to chronicle the status of services. Though not the primary goal of early care and education, it has become apparent that for the field to advance it needs to develop a vision extending beyond direct services.

Indeed, an early care and education infrastructure is needed, replete with the specific functions that such a system must carry out. Chronicled by the *Quality 2000* initiative, these functions include: (1) fostering cross-system collaboration; (2) enhancing consumer and public involvement; (3) assuring quality control; (4) maintaining adequate levels of financing; and (5) fostering the development of the work force (Kagan & the *Quality 2000* Essential Functions and Change Strategies Task Force, in press). Still somewhat fresh, these ideas are generating controversy regarding the appropriate use of limited expenditures. Until such tension is resolved, the field will find it problematic to move forward cohesively.

Issue 7: Redressing the Limited Understanding of and Constituency for Early Childhood Education

Given the divisiveness that exists in the field, it is not surprising that a common early care and education constituency does not exist. To the contrary, when opportunities for new programs arise, the field presents such a divided front that funders are overwhelmed by the different requests and positions proffered. Indeed, given scarce resources and the omni-present threats of program extinction, program providers often advocate for the expansion of

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their own programs over the expansion of others or of the systemic infrastructure. Moreover, families--often lacking time or inclination--have not been routinely or effectively mobilized to effect an impact on national policy. Inundated with worries about program funding and operations, practitioners rarely have the time or energy to focus on constituency building. Funds to develop the kind of comprehensive media or public education strategy that might inspire such constituency development are lacking. And there has been only very limited training around constituency development.

The reality is that early care and education has been inner-directed for decades, ferreting through its definitions of quality, determining effective ratios, and developing curriculum strategies. Only in rare communities--indeed successful communities--has the early childhood community systematically sought to commander public understanding of and support for its work. In many communities, early childhood education remains isolated from mainstream services. To meet the needs of families and communities, more outer-directed, consumer and constituent-based efforts must be conceptualized and undertaken.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES: CHANGE, CONTINUITY, AND COLLABORATION

Outsiders, when they think of early education, often ascribe its goals as the teaching of the three "r's": reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. This one conceptualization is not a frame that adequately characterizes our rich history and the demanding work performed by early educators. Alternatively, I propose that the three "r's" should be converted to the three "c'"--change, continuity, and collaboration. These are what we stress and what we try to promote for children and for ourselves.

Why Change, Continuity, and Collaboration?

Change. It is axiomatic that few living organisms change as rapidly and as profoundly as the human infant. Recognizing this, those who study and serve infants and young children have devoted their lives to examining the phenomenon of human change, perhaps as closely and intensely as any other discipline. We call ourselves developmentalists, a name that embraces evolution and change. This commitment to change is manifest every day in scores of early childhood settings the world over, with an orientation to fostering change in children being natural and desirable. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, the field most committed to nurturing change in children understands little about how to manage change for adults and for systems. For families and communities to come together on behalf of children, change in how we conceptualize and deliver services will need to take place (Kagan & Weissbourd, 1994).

Continuity. Continuity is as fundamental as change is to early childhood development. Scholars and practitioners have long recognized that there must be continuity in children's lives, be it continuity as children mature vertically through sequential stages of life, or horizontal continuity as children seek to integrate the many domains of their lives--social, emotional, cognitive, physical. Many of our fundamental practices support

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continuity; indeed, sustaining the continuity of children's experiences in terms of culture, language, and values--a challenge facilitated through ties between programs and parents--remains a central part of the early childhood tradition.

Yet, despite the centrality of the principle and practice of continuity, a number of challenges related to the coherence of children's early years have not been adequately addressed. While continuity in curriculum and pedagogy, and continuity amongst programs of different auspices have been clearly recognized as key aspects affecting children's developmental transitions, factors such as peer constancy, consistency of developmental messages given to parents, and the possibilities of using public policy to achieve continuity have been given less attention. In reality, then, the principle of continuity has not been as fully infused to our ideas and actions related to families, community and the early childhood system as it might be.

Collaboration. Linking change and continuity, collaboration has long been ideologically central to the early childhood field. After all, teachers in early childhood classrooms work together collaboratively, often in teaching pairs, and teachers work collaboratively with parents. Certainly the field has demonstrated a *spirit* of collaboration. Yet, in practice, collaboration has been somewhat more remote on several levels. First, segments of the field have been skeptical about linking with other early childhood workers. We have been content to work with children in our individual programs, not acknowledging the strengths to be obtained from collaborative work with one another. We often refer to this as a lack of within-field integration. Second, some--though increasingly fewer--early childhood centers have remained separate from other community institutions--including schools, health bureaucracies, welfare agencies, and family support efforts, reluctant to collaborate with those from other fields, known as across-field integration. Today, as the needs of children become more complex and as community resources become more constrained, incentives for collaboration within the field and across fields must be created.

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How to Achieve the Three C's

In discussing how to achieve a context that is more receptive to families and communities, a transcendent principle followed by a promising example in each of the three areas--change, continuity, and collaboration--is presented. Taken together, these principles reflect some key conceptual guideposts while the illustrations serve as concrete examples.

Change. It has often been said that the first step to achieving change is to recognize and define what needs to be changed. To accomplish this in early childhood education means that we need to adopt a principle of *analytic investigation* or getting beneath superficial problems and examining the assumptions that undergird them. In some cases, ideological assumptions that may have guided policy and practice can be dispelled by data. In other cases, new technology may eclipse conventional ways of thinking about development and learning. In still other cases, fresh perspectives and knowledge may be brought to bear on the issues at hand. Finally, we need to examine opportunities for change, ferreting out the nature of the legislative and regulatory processes that might be more flexible than previously thought. In short, it is not simply demographics that have changed; our entire analytic mode of operation needs to be examined for technological, data, and political changes that are presently more conducive to supporting young children, their families, and communities.

An example of using analysis to advance practice comes from the family support movement. The family support movement--formally begun just several decades ago--is burgeoning in America, serving families and communities in inventive new ways. How did it begin? The family support movement had its origins in grass roots, community-based efforts. Local folks looked around and decided that services to families delivered through conventional bureaucracies were not working. They analyzed the situation, analyzed alternatives, and set about creating a new "family friendly" approach to providing services. This was not a fancy academic analysis, per se; it was a community analysis that yielded the information and the collective motivation to mobilize communities to action. Presently, there are thousands of family support programs throughout the nation, and increasing numbers of mainstream institutions--schools, hospitals, health centers, municipalities--are adopting the principles of family support. Armed with a $93 million federal act in the U.S., family support and family preservation are becoming big business in the social service world. Indeed, family support is functioning as one the significant incentives to on-going community change.

Overall, the time is currently right to advance community change as one of the cornerstones of the early childhood field. To capitalize on this zeitgeist for change, we need to extend our domains of analysis and our domains of action beyond early childhood classrooms to the boardrooms of business and the anterooms of political chambers. In short, I am suggesting that only by strategically planning for change will it produce the contextual changes needed to support children and families.

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Continuity. The second principle suggests that we take a long-haul perspective to our work, fully recognizing the field's continuity with the past. It suggests that we acknowledge the history of our field, noting its profound legacies. One seemingly inescapable legacy is that decades of short-term, piece-meal policymaking has yielded a system laden with inequities for children and families. In acknowledging the past, we see that the work at hand is not about creating short-term changes--band-aid solutions to cover the problems. Rather, the solutions need to be constructed with the goal of cementing a more cohesive, more equitable field for the future.

A clear example of the continuity principle exists in efforts to create transitions for children and their families as the move from community preschool programs to schools. For the past 35 years, through a series of federal initiatives, "transition" efforts, as they have been dubbed, have attempted to create linkages through a series of worthwhile add-on activities: transfer of records, parent meetings, spring visitations for "rising" children between preschools and schools. Evaluations have indicated the limitations of these efforts, with new work calling for much more strategic efforts that acknowledge the depth of the schism between schools and preschools. These efforts suggest that we need to address serious issues of differences in pedagogy, attitudes, and structures--including differences in salary and compensation packages (Kagan, 1991a). Recognizing previous limitations, researchers and practitioners are now working to not only create activities, but to change the structures and policies that affect how the activities can occur. In short, by dedicating work to more durable and systemic change, current efforts are creating ongoing opportunities for continuity among community institutions.

Collaboration. The third principle is to recognize that the future of early childhood education rests as much with those outside our field--families, communities, and the economic, social and political leadership of our nations--as it does with those within the field. We need to systematically mobilize new constituencies, making their commitment to the care and education of young children durable. Not easy to accomplish, the mobilization of constituents must include a more systematic top-down and bottom-up approach. People unfamiliar with early childhood education must be engaged. Parents and teachers--those closest to children--must also be encouraged to understand that while commitment to an individual child or to an individual group of children--a classroom--is critical, it is not sufficient. Individual children are products of their socio-cultural contexts and these contexts--be they hallmarked by violence or by fragmented, inequitable services--need attention as well. In short, the personal commitments of the 1980s must be converted into societal commitment of the 1990s.

Examples of this are beginning to emerge with the advent of local planning councils and community-based strategies for mobilization around young children. In several states in the U.S., for example, state-wide councils have been established to coordinate children's services. Often these take the form of governors cabinets or citizen-driven councils. Whatever their form, many serve as catalysts to focus governmental and private-sector attention to the needs of young children. In some areas, these state-wide councils have

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counterparts at the local level, with linkages--often via the technology super highway--created to share information and services. For the most part, these efforts include parents and community representatives and are concentrating on creating integrated early childhood systems, replete with adequate training for providers, accessible resource and referral services for parents, and high quality programs and services for children. Equally promising efforts are taking hold in some communities and states via a goals setting or outcomes strategy. Members of communities are brought together to consider what outcomes they would like to accomplish for their communities, lists are developed, annual benchmarks created, and a system for assessing accomplishments derived. These efforts are particularly exciting because they engage large numbers of the community, often span numerous fields, and focus on achieving results (Kagan, Goffin, Golub, & Pritchard, 1994).

Put simply, the field needs to band together, to be clear on its visions. The early childhood field is not about reading, and 'riting, and 'rithmétic--though we are concerned with the precursors of these all-important skills. More accurately, the field is about change--within the lives of children and families, within the political and social landscape, within early care and education itself. It is about creating continuity for children, adults, and all aspects of the early childhood system. And finally, the field is about collaboration on the personal, programmatic, and systemic levels. The three "c's" of the early childhood field span all of these levels, occasioning diverse challenges, demanding dedicated attention, and providing formidable opportunities for reform. The early childhood field stands at one of the most exciting moments in its history; we must respond together, taking the context in which children grow into consideration. We must build upon the fundamental principles of our profession and use them to achieve our visions of what we want for ourselves, our profession, and our communities.

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